

the terror of earrings

poems by dennis cooper



\$2.00

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Ann-Hi-Pan
C 77656

I don't know what I'm going to do
but it will include the terror
of earrings, earrings on the backseat.

~James Tate

for Robert Davis

my dearest friend in life

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Room 304

A strange choir boy
bathing inside
that small room there.

Downstairs by the elevator his
choir practices without him.
Their thick lips reach for the sky
wishing for a little kiss.

His robes slide slowly across
a mahogany guitar neck.
The air smells of roses and feet.

I can hear the water sighing.
He is humming something delicate, old,

I hope his god doesn't try to reposes
right now.

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Save this marriage

(Based on a poem and dream
by Jerene Cline)

Mary and I share a cigarette
in our vanilla livingroom
in a house we have lived in all our lives,
I am tired of hearing her sunshine voice.
The smell of her flesh makes me carsick.
I can't stand to watch her smile.

I leave her mouthing John Sebastian songs
and wander down the hall to the closet
for a sweater.

I open its doors with bored hands
and discover a secret room I have
never seen before,
dark and huge and empty and silent.

I step inside and shut the door behind me.
Mary's and John's stale joy world is gone.

God, I wish you'd bring your painted face
over and mime us a child
or something.

upon reading Michael Horovitz's afterwords
to Children of Albion

a poem filters inside you
the get together hand flower rots
and stains the palms of your hands

another Dylan compromise
a joining of mass and flow

a poem loved to you

a mouth

a pale child burning a church

a god with machine gun arms caress you

#26 for Jimmy Stegmiller

I feel as though
each day a poem
gasping in my arms

lured by a particular face or movement

I remember you said the way you loved
like a blind man combing his hair.

Prince

Two boys play in a parking lot
in the rain. They stand
at opposite ends and throw cans
at each other, then later,
cling together under their delicate
afros licking each others'
faces clean with short pink tongues.

I watch them thru Dave's window.
In his room the radio plays a
naked California rock n roll song
with
a bass run the size of my fist.

Dave stands with his back against
the window narrowing his eyes
and pounding an imaginary drum,
unaware or not caring that
outside his window the war is over.

Kissing their dreams goodbye

(for Susie)

An apartment complex is demolished.
Eleven thin albino boys gather across
the street to watch.
Walls fold in on each other.
The boys stand motionless.
A Mexican woman leans from her car to
admire the boys and their majestic
beauty, "They look like princes."
Their eyes never leave the destruction
site. Thick men sweat and pound
until one wall remains standing.
The boys' maroon velvet jumpsuits
rustle in the Chicago wind.
They seem to have no emotions at all.
As the last wall falls their
stares continue. The building
is flat, dust settles. The workers
start home with their lunch pails.
Suddenly the boys gasp, bend over
gagging. The boys are kissing their
dreams goodbye. The albino princes
are swallowing their tongues.

Object #2

and he folds his hands into his hair.
"I don't want to say anything." She looks
at him for a moment then at her dress.
"Fine. Better that way."
"What?" He turns his head to glare at her,
his eyes as vicious as cups of coffee.
"I don't want to watch television or go
to the movies or drink. Leave me to die,
Gloria." His face relaxes and flattens,
"And I do....love..."
She smiles her wondrous, thin smile,
"Of course."

He dreams, "I'll have to kill her. My
life is being wasted. There are no hopes
or dreams but this one. No one would
know. I've got to do something..."

She thinks, "To leave here I will have
to make him want it. The only reason I
don't is where would I go. With who
would I cry or dance? There must be a man
capable of salvation..."

From their daughter's bedroom door a red
beachball rolls out across the white rug.
They notice its entrance and follow its
noiseless progress into the room.

April in Venice

the winter has left foam
on the sidewalks, spring
eats the bubbles,

the sun rings like a bell
overhead, hot dogs smell like
playdoh,

there is a man being stabbed
by the restroom,
Spanish laughter, muffled, moving
up the beach.

Old Friend

you and I, we don't
love the same music
anymore.

I go to your house,
we watch television,
I want to fuck you
up your ass.

I want to kill your
bellbottoms, kill you.

Monday afternoon, May 1973

The roses I dropped in
the sink last week go on
living without their
bodies as if no one is
waiting to wash their
hair.

When hot thin Michelle comes
by tomorrow she'll tell me it's
Eric Brown trying to communicate
with me from the grave.

The walnut heads that Cliff
got in Polynesia are making
their own commotion over by
the fireplace.

I creep up from behind and
push them into the flames.

A small moth owns our
bedroom. We can't get to
sleep at night for fear it
will be dead in the morning.

This has gone on for months.
Soon we plan to teach it to
bring us our cigarettes.
Then we will teach it to talk.

A poem for a dancer at the Bitter End West

An old thin fleshed woman named
Helen tells her friend Laura
stories that all end with the same
punch line - "I kept **waiting** for
someone else to say something."

Laura can't stop staring at the
countless veins that crease the skin
of Helen's legs and finally has to
leave for fear she will notice her
noticing. As soon as Laura has started

her car in the driveway Helen begins
eating kleenex. The thought that no
one knows what she is doing excites her.
She eats faster. Laura, stopping for a

red light thinks, "I will visit her
tomorrow. I will leave my house at
10 A.M., I should be there by 11."

David

2.

My sister cries
with her monthly cramps.

In her arms David lies
trying to nudge her
into quiet.

His smooth back
wavering
beneath her arms.

His young, softly pocked
face at her neck
whispering something
from a sad movie,

"It will be allright, baby."
"Stay with me, baby."

3.

Robert, in his subtle wisdom,

to him death is only as important as
which shirt he will wear today.
He does not worry about endings,

he frees thousands of butterflies
he has hidden up his sleeves.
He carries the hard breath of love
in his chest.

The night is another one.
Smiles have come few and cautiously.
He brushes his hair into a scarf.

His eyes fall like casual matchbooks
to the dresser and the fine, old
bottles he has collected.

(continued)

In an evening surrounded by rock
he is alone in his room.

He pretends Peter Pan is watching
him undress.
He draws back the bedsheet
like the eyelid of a dead child.

4. A face in the window

She lowers her eyes.
She traces diamonds in the bottom
of a fishtin with her thumbnail.
She starts her evening with
a glance in the mirror and the thought
that Frank's wrists were blind.

Thursday by herself sitting
by the bedroom window eating sardines.
Love is a vague control.

The night is like a paraplegic
grandfather who funnels his total
energy thru his eyes.
He rolls into the room.

The night watches her and love
defend themselves, props itself
up in her bed moaning.

She covers her eyes. =
She walks over to the bed, bows when
stars appear, lowers herself to night,
begins to masturbate.

6.

Tonight a young stranger asks to use our phone
and stays for hours calling everyone he knows.
He whispers
but whispers are dead. There are no more whispers.

Church

After James Dean in Rebel Without
a Cause ends we lie naked in bed, his
blond hair falling into my eyes.

I slip my arms around him.
He slowly and deliberately braids
my hair. His laughter is mechanical.

Two months together has left us
like soft robots, responding to whim
with lifelike abandon, fucking
and changing our clothes.

We have to think up games to get
excited. Tonight he falls back on the
bed screaming, "Touch Cleopatra!"

It works. I turn him over, divide
his fat and go straight for the ruby.
His penis pretends it is an asp and
weaves its way into my fist.

He starts squirming. I lean over
to kiss his jewel. I find myself
kneeling over him. Hell, there isn't
any God.

Poem on The Waltons

When a star falls
over Waltons' mountain
gasps from beneath the porch
of wild haired boys, stopped midwhisper.
A line of faces upturned in amazement.
The gentle glow of gas lanterns
on tablecloths.

Flour patties rolled into quiet
fists cook slowly in a shallow pan.
John Boy's eyes spark,
poems swirl within his grasp,
his arms flail, face cracks, laughter.

A woman, his mother, her pale wrists
sleeping in a worn blue apron.
A goat scratching at the wooden
links of his pen.

Children's faces turned to learn
the nature of this noise.
A father's thick hand touches John
Boy's hair and lifts his face to him.
A father and son stare frantically
into each others' eyes.

#34

I have to explain it to Jason, at ten
years old, begging me to take him
across the universe to the planet where
dreams are transformed into flesh.

Where creatures with immense heads open
doors with their thoughts.

Where the U.S.S. Enterprize lisps thru
a thousand galaxies.

I have to be the one to destroy it.
He must be content, as I was,
with a trip to Europe.

I crouch beside him glancing frantically
towards his eyes. I speak quickly.
"William Shatner, who played Capt. Kirk
on Star Trek, is now fat and middleaged.
Spock had rubber ears."

A boy who works in a railroad yard
and limps. He lifts off his
tank top and poses in my bed.

Under the sweep of a Panama
rotary fan I accept his fury. I accept
the 21st century and its mechanics.

This boy is a robot. I find strands
of nylon in a wound on his thumb.
When I touch him between his legs

his eyes light up.
Soon our bodies begin to betray us.
Smoke shoots out of our navels.

I call to him, "Casey, over here!"
He staggers into my arms. I hold on
to his haircut for dear life.

We eat more mescaline. He laughs too
hard at the pale backbone of my jokes.
In my bedroom we sit too close together.

A television poem

When Ray Charles visited The
Tonight Show first Ed McMahon made
funny faces he couldn't see.

Then Johnny stole his dark glasses
and kicked his chair out from under
him.

Then when the audience was really
enjoying Johnny's antics he looked
down at the lump of black genius
writhing pathetically on the floor
and said, "Come on Ray, play us
some blues."

A Brief Plan

I am standing thigh deep in
a Eureka river.
In my open hand an apple
is rotting.

Young George is writhing his
delicate body in the water at
my knees.

His slick brown flesh is like
a marvelous prehistoric mammal's.

He is the perfect friend.

He says he's going to be a
priest someday.

My attention is half his, the
rest of the time I am terrified
of decay.

This apple's slow death is a
crude hand mirror.

I do not agree with its opinion.

George will be sixteen in three
months and as my gift I am going
to marry him.

I plan to kidnap him from his
parents.

We will live here among the hills.

We will eat the bark of trees,
pinecones, pebbles.

I am not afraid of love.

I will be happy with the small,
cool kisses of my young husband.

I will smear the blood from
George's battered rectum joyously
over my body.

A Night For Jim Morrison

Immense, slippery creatures are coming into
town with thin, dynamic black women astride
their backs. The women are mute and stare
meaninglessly thru milky glass eyes. Their
purpose in entering the village is something
foreign even amongst themselves. They do not
think, "I want to ride into this village."
They merely enter town.

March

"All this fantasy, Christ, I wish
all this God damned fantasy crap
would go away. I'm all for reality.
Give it up. There's no fantasy. I don't
believe in fantasy."

- Theodore Moss

In dark windows on my street
boys crouch amid stars fingering
their bow ties. Older boys crawl
from between their legs.

* * *

A spider made its web
in Kevin's hair while he was
waxing his surfboard.

He has a tattoo on his arm
that says "A violent man is",
after all, a violent man" in
red and green letters.

He is too gentle to look at
himself in the mirror. He is
afraid he would see a cement wall.

* * *

I'm hungry.
I lay down in the roller coaster
tracks at New Pike.
If I lay here long enough

(continued)

To the beach

Steven and I drop by, frail lumps
from our summer jobs, to eat
cheese sandwiches and smoke Larks
in the sand.

A slender tanned boy
stands embracing himself.
I want to swallow his breath.

We stretch out cautiously on our bellies.
Our pale flesh scorches and
lifts from our backs.
Our rinds split.

We are like gaudy cripples
surrounded by casual enemies.

These tanned boys of Santa Monica
are not afraid of how famous
they will be tomorrow.
They do not fall into themselves,
they use their fists.

angels will come out of the sky
and give me gum.

*

*

I take a clown with me to
the bar. We dance.

People notice us, begin to stare.
It is the moment I've waited
for. I climb up on a barstool
and read them my poems.

The clown finds his way to
me and slips his arm about my
waist. My audience cheers at this.
I believe they are applauding for
me. I look at the clown.
The clown is smiling at me as if
I were another clown.

Justice

Father says when I sleep
bricks are dumped on my head
and I have to fight my way
out.

Mother says all the golden
things I will never own visit
me when I sleep, it's like
dropping in on a cloud.

I say it is one of their plans
to keep me in their house.
I think they hide pills in
my milk and when I have fallen
asleep they carry me into
a secret room and beat me
with sticks.

Five Poems for Michael

1. Arizona Sunrise

At the mesa
I lean back on sharp elbows
to eat Michael's hair
in handfuls
like strands of a Cherokee blanket
Gagging on small, crisp mouthfuls

Arizona's great desert
shifting beneath his back
He looks at me
with his fucked up
blue eyes

The dryness of wind has turned
his lips to toast
I eat breakfast at the corners
of his mouth

2. At Venice Beach, Calif.

In the heat
fat babies on apartment building
roofs searching for casual mothers
poach below the knee

Handsome boys beneath the pier
cowering **knee** deep in an oil slick
slip a thin brown finger
up each others' asses,
beckon with scarred smiles
pale East Coast boys

The splintered rib cage
of an ancient amusement park
flickers nearby,
the frail arms of its roller coaster
reach skyward

I wonder from Michael's arms
what death must feel like
to the touch,
whether it makes the hand dance
or causes it to form
quickly
into a fist.

3. Michael playing guitar

Michael,
his hair tied back tight
against the skull
His face like Rimbaud's
Searching
Playing long, calm woman
voices on his acoustic guitar

Lenny curls over a massive
keyboard threading together
Chicano rhythms
with veins of thin, pulsing
moog liquid

There is a prophetic warmth
in the room
Michael smiles at me from
behind his cigarette with
the dark and nervous
expression of a child who
has dazzled his father

4. Balboa Island

My father's threats
following me
from his office and
into the street
and that word QUEER
spat out
of his tired mouth
like the end
of a cigar

I turn, scream NO
so loud it cracks
my father's windows,
my father's head

I go to Michael but
he doesn't understand
my energy
We exist miles apart
in his bedroom
I want desperately
to kiss him
He is just bored enough
to let me
We burrow
into each other
like fat worms

5. New York City

Saying goodbye
in the Orange Julius at 45th St.
with a copy of Shelley under
his arm

I start kissing the warm
flutter in his wrists, a plea
His clean smile
in my ears

Smooth shoulders
under his ski sweater
rising, falling into my hands
like perfect moons

He thanks me for
so innocent a revenge,
that he leaves behind
the image
of a James Dean angel

I lie that I want to
remember him
as a perfect being

My hands moving over him
My fingertips noiselessly
searching for scars
in his lean body

Photographs of my Summer

(for Robert) "Some kinds of love
are mistaken for vision."
-Lou Reed

Blood in the mouths of the boys on Sunset
and when they climb in,
the playful, ageless odor of chocolate
and marijuana.

Their magic lies somewhere
in the vague smears
of their idols.

A second hand illusion.

* *

David's mother dead
tangled up in the front
seat of her car.

David with his fist up
screaming at the sun,
"Fuck you, you lanky
bastard!"

* *

I am too fat to exist
and lie on my stomach across
the bed writing poems
to satisfy hot tongues
in my chest, occasionally my head.

(continued)

I'm only satisfied
when my friends torture me
with the limpness of wrists
and I can beg my imagination
for the gentleness of a boy's lips
to soothe Adonis from his cave,
his sparkling nuances.

* *

Walking thru Robert's house.
His soft laughter all around.

Feeling calm in sight of
his sweaters on the coffee table.
Cautious not to break
the surface of his friendship.

Joan Baez records in the bedroom.
Robert's father talking slowly
to himself.
Cigarettes pancaked on the kitchen
floor.
The ashes of a sigh everywhere.

* *

I'm too drunk to unzip Julian's
blue jeans so he places
my large hand there
in the small warm.

Wondering at my strange,
kind words
with darkness all around his eyes.

I spend half my life
chasing mosquitos
from his legs

My hips are tents.
Beneath me
he performs miracles.

For Don Johnson and Dale Hong

David was brutally blond.
When he threw the guitar
at Steve his feet skidded
out from under him.

No one in the room ran
to catch him falling back
noiselessly into the
drumset.

Steve swerved to avoid
the guitar and saw David's
head hit the corner
of the bass drum

and "his eyes go crazy and
his skull thud."

It was the sound of angels
knocking on wood
in the summertime.

(continued)

Dennis Cooper was born January 10, 1953 in Pasadena, Calif, currently resides in Arcadia.

He writes the rock music column for a local newspaper, The Eagle.

His favorite poets are James Tate, Anne Sexton, Tom Clark, Jim Morrison.

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